

TPIE's best booths and cool plants



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TROPICAL TOPICS

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Cool Plants
Plant-Adjacents



Ball Culture Guide

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By JIM NAU

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Great to Be Back

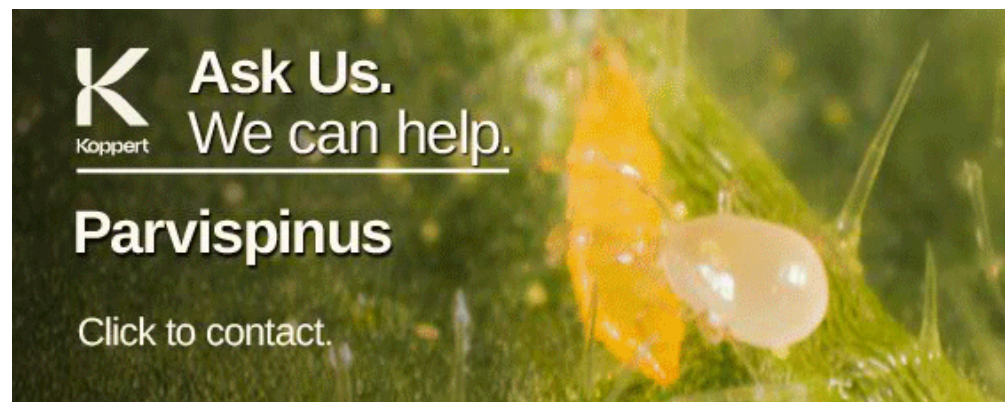
It was great to be back at the Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE), and in the presence of both in-the-flesh people and plants. And, thank you, FNGLA, for the reintroduction to Tampa. It's been gosh-close to 25 years since my last visit. A really nice city! Happy to go back next January.

The show's official numbers for the show came out earlier this week from FNGLA's CEO Ben Bolusky. Here are just a few:

- The show had 5,953 registrations for 2022, which is a bit down from 6,850 in 2020. They figure the difference is due to exhibitors bringing 700 fewer staff.
- 96% of the booth spaces on the floor were full!
- Folks came from 46 states and 30 countries.
- Retail buyers numbered 1,258.
- 1,100 people registered for the Road Shows and educational sessions.



Considering the Omicron variant was spreading like wildfire in early January and we really are still calf-deep in a pandemic, the attendance numbers are outstanding. Buyers want to be inspired by displays and get their mitts on any supplies they can. People—both vendors and buyers—were doing business and happy.



Speaking of Inspiration ...

Some of the best booths are those that go way beyond the typical pipe-and-drape setup and inspire passersby to not only stop in, but also to take some display ideas (and products!) home with them. This year's TPIE Booth Awards once again recognized the most inspirational booths on the show floor. Show coordinators spiced up the categories a bit this year—a new host city, a new set of award recognitions. How wonderful! They gave out 11 awards in all, including:

Best Use of a Large Space (The Pottery Patch) ...



The Pottery Patch made great use of the vertical space.

Best Use of a Small Space (Kreative Gardens) ...



I give Kreative Gardens bonus points for being all-found objects and (mostly) recyclable.

Excellent Use of Storytelling (LiveTrends Design Group) ...

IMAGINE HAPPINESS

Euphoria Collection, New Wave Collection





Storytelling makes understanding products and a company's core beliefs so much easier for the customer.

And the **Standout In a Crowd (Penang Nursery) ...**





Penang's Willy Wonka-style booth left no detail of the story untouched.

It's really inspirational that TPIE gave out an **Outstanding First-Time Exhibitor Award**. Just look at this totally stealable Pantone-like color display from the folks at HDS USA LLC. What an ego boost that must have been for the person who created it and will no doubt inspire her to get more creative with her next booth.



Color hues are guaranteed to catch the eye.

Other booth award-winners are:

- Best Plant Display, Large Space—Excelsa Gardens
- Best Plant Display, Small Space—Florida Tropiculture
- Best Non-Plant Display, Large Space—Pottery Pots
- Best Non-Plant Display, Small Space—Jackson Pottery
- Excellent Brand Promotion, Large Space—Bethel Farms
- Excellent Brand Promotion, Small Space—Pope's Plant Farm
- Inspiration at Its Best—Costa Farms



Cool Plants

The presentation of the Cool Product Awards from The Garden Center Group's Danny Summers is one of the highlights of TPIE. Why? Because these "cool products" are chosen by a select group of garden center owners who assess all of the show's offerings and pick these few as, "Yeah, I wanna sell that!" types of items. These folks know what appeals to their customers. And from a first-round hopper of 70 plants and products, just 15 were chosen for 2022.

I'm including the five plants and three "plant-adjacent" winners (you'll see what I mean) in today's *Tropical Topics*. I'll reveal the seven items that I'm placing in the "accessories" category next week.

Without further ado, the plant winners of the Cool Product Awards are:



Whale Fin Albo from Aroid Greenhouses. This variegated sansevieria is a rare item—as the tender clutching of the pot by one of the two sisters behind the business was doing during Danny’s presentation might indicate. They’ve had this specimen for a few years and now have enough propagated to sell a few hundred or so. You may remember the Aroid folks from 2020 when they displayed a cool “plant truck” (think food truck), and their Cool Products Awards for a mottled green and also a light yellow-green striped Whale Fin. www.aroidgreenhouses.com



Mad About Mangave Mission to Mars from Florida Tropiculture. Mangaves—the intergeneric cross between a Manfreda and an agave—are not “new” new, but new enough to still take one’s breath away when one spots a cool shape, color or form. Florida Tropiculture’s Mission to Mars specimen did just that for the Cool Product judges. www.floridatropiculture.net



***Tradescantia minima* Pink Panther from Holt Nurseries.** Holt's owner said this is one of her favorite plants, mainly for that punch of pink for partial shade locations and its ease of propagation. In fact, she created a few ready-to-root segments as she picked up the pot. It's easy to pinch and creates a nicely mounding plant. www.holtnurseries.com



***Alocasia curpea* Red Secret from Northland Floral.** This item has amazingly shiny leaves—and large, too, at a foot long on a plant that is just 18-in. tall. And, most importantly, Northland has availability. (Is it me or does Red Secret look like the forehead of a Klingon?)

www.northlandfloral.com



Philodendron Red Moon from R&D Nurseries. This extremely rare philodendron has a few half-red/half-chartreuse leaves on each plant. Some stems are also colored with red. And, yes, the coloring does get a bit darker as the leaves age. R&D is currently sold out, but do book pre-orders for June and beyond or you'll miss out. www.rdnurseries.com

Sun Parasol
FiredUp Coral



Plant-Adjacents

That's what I'm calling the items that are plants and something else. Such as ...



Florida Cactus's potted plants in instruments. The company's overall booth display rang all the bells for IGC owner judges at TPIE. Florida Cactus used old drum kits, guitars, French horns and other flea market finds to contain their lines of cacti and succulents, along with their message, "Plants That Perform." The play on words, inspiration with the instruments and the accessibility of the idea are what won this company their Cool Product Award.

www.floridacactus.com



Kazumi Gardens' kokedama. Here, it's plants in something—specifically plants beautifully wrapped in moss using the Japanese technique known as kokedama. Kazumi won a Cool Product Award in 2020, and this year's award is due to an expansion of available wrapped plant varieties, and their many new ideas for holding and displaying the moss-covered balls.

www.kazumigarden.com



Pope's Plant Farm's assorted succulent planters. Pope's won a Cool New Product Award for the wide assortment of succulent combination containers—from portly pigs to small-statured bunnies, as well as natural-looking containers. They're fun, and honestly, it's hard to choose a favorite. www.popesplantfarm.com

Stay tuned for the next issue of *Tropical Topics* when I'll include the non-plant Cool Products—and a bunch of other items I thought were pretty cool myself. And if you didn't catch my post-TPIE *Buzz* newsletter from last week, I included a rundown of my off-site plant shop visits and the show's "fan favorite" winners. Give it a read [HERE](#).

Comments, questions or news to share? Just drop me a line at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



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